

My thanks to Kristina Hansen whose inspiration made this sermon possible.

On a good day – the sun is out – the flowers are blooming – there’s a gentle breeze – you feel on top of the world – you get the picture – it is so easy to see Jesus in nature and in other people, but what about when things aren’t so good? When you’re not feeling up to part – when you are worried about something – when you are discouraged – when things are just not going right, do you see Jesus then?

Our scripture today tells a story of two people (probably a married couple according to many Bible scholars) discouraged, disheartened, depressed, and disappointed, disillusioned. (How’s that for alliteration?) They were on their way home from Passover.

I think the trip of seven miles felt like 70 miles unlike the walk *into* Jerusalem for Passover. Their trip *to* Jerusalem was filled with anticipation. They felt strong and invincible. Jesus rode in triumphantly – surely, he would be the one who would redeem Israel! But now he is gone! Crucified three days ago, and now as they walk back home, their feet are heavy and their spirits discouraged, disheartened, etc. It must have felt like walking through quicksand.

Doesn’t it feel that way when we are discouraged and feel our hope is gone and we need to face the day with faith that things will get better?

Let me tell you story of two people on a hike, a little longer than 7 miles – 2,200 to be more accurate, would you believe 5,422,210 steps! Our daughter and her friend were hiking the Appalachian thru hike from George to Maine. They were about 2 months into their hike, when – let me tell you in Dragonfly’s words; (by the way, thru hikers use trail names. Leslie, our daughter’s name is Prairie Dog and her friend is Dragonfly). Here is Dragonfly’s recounting of events.

“After a month on the trail, we were feeling pretty great. Physically, we were getting our hiking legs. Emotionally, life was simplified as our responsibilities had been reduced to eating, hydration, safe landings, and walking, walking, walking...and spiritually?! Spiritually, everyday was an odyssey of discovery of the immensity and the stunning, resourceful resilience of nature – of our creator’s creation...

“At the two month mark we were leaving Pearisburg, Virginia with full packs (**35 lbs**) and a 20 mile goal. I was a little anxious at such an ambitious goal given our heavy packs. Prairie Dog (Leslie) was eager and confident. Two miles in she tore her calf muscle and it sent us spiraling down.

“Our rescue from the trail was a series of miracles, for which we were grateful. But then the rehabilitation process needed to start. For four days we advanced from full bed rest and ice, to walking with crutches, to hobbling with a light backpack around town, to finally packing it all up and heading back out with full backpacks, an ace bandage around her calf, and daily doses of medication to keep the swelling and pain down.

“In contrast to the 20 miles we’d envisioned less than a week earlier, we spent the first day back out going a painstakingly slow 5 miles. We arrived at camp exhausted and spent with anxiety. In the late afternoon sunlight we set up our tent and began to prepare dinner, but the breeze from the last few miles turned into a wind and by the time we ate it was pouring rain. The next day we packed up our wet tent and ended up with soaked hiking shoes in the time it took us to cover the several hundred yards across the field outside of camp. The four days of hiking out of Pearisburg were slow and discouraging. By the time we reached the road where our next food drop had been delivered, we were dreading the half mile off trail we needed to go pick it up, and the four more miles to hike after we got back to the trail.

“But...as we wended our way to the trailhead at Virginia rural route 42, we made the acquaintance of a thru hiker named Dixie Grits. Dixie Grits lived nearby this particular trailhead and so had decided to take a couple of weeks break to visit with his girlfriend and with his son. He was dropping off two guys who he’d had taken up to a convenience store about 4 miles away to pick up some supplies.

“He took one look at us and said, “You know some days you just don’t feel like a hiker.” He was right about that and he made it his goal to take care of us! So he drove us to pick up our food drop; then he took us to the convenience store for some lemonade, iced teas, and Gatorade; then he took us out to dinner; then he took us back to his son’s home. We took showers, washed our clothes, dried our shoes, slept in real beds and the next day all three of us headed back out on the trail. We hiked a 20 mile day and we felt like hikers again!”

In the gospel lesson today the writer lets us know that it was Jesus who was walking with the two disciples, but they don't know it is Jesus. Not until after they invite him to stay and he broke bread with them, did they recognize Christ's presence...at that moment they knew it was Jesus!

Instead of a seven mile day it became a 14 mile day because they rushed back to Jerusalem after dinner to tell the others that what the women had told them that morning was true. "The Lord has risen."

Admittedly, I'm a little annoyed that when the women told them Jesus had risen they didn't believe it, but when the **men** say it, it was believed! But truthfully the concept of resurrection is awfully big and mysterious. It is so easy to miss Jesus' presence among us especially when we are discouraged, depressed, disheartened, and disappointed.

I ask you "where was Jesus when Dragonfly and Prairie Dog were struggling so hard? Where was Jesus then? Where was the Christ for them? Where is God when it hurts?"

Dragonfly tells us: "The Christ greeted us at Virginia Route 42 and said to us "You know, some days you just don't feel like a hiker" and then took care of us and sent us on our way again. That day Christ's name was Dixie Grits.

"On a subzero, windy, almost zero visibility day in the White Mountains, Christ was a man dressed from head to foot in a bright orange rain suit outside a hut that we might have missed if he hadn't caught my eye. By the way, we went in and stayed the night before climbing Mount Washington the next day and we never saw him again. On another day Christ showed up as an older couple at our remote trailhead in Maine who could barely give us a rational reason for why they were there. Our guide book said, 'Difficult hitch, very light traffic.' Most people don't even try to get in from there. But on our way down the mountain, we **needed** to get in. And so, the sweet couple who hardly knew why they were there themselves took us to town."

Let me tell you of a time when I was discouraged, depressed, and admittedly a little scared, when Jesus came to me. Years ago, before cell phones, I was stranded 30 or 35 miles from the nearest town. You have to understand the prairies of South Dakota to get a picture of how alone I felt. I didn't have any idea how far the nearest ranch house was or for that matter **where** the nearest ranch house was. Finally after what seemed like 5 or 6 hours (in reality more like 2 or 3 hours) Christ came in the form of two teenagers who said they would go tell their dad of my predicament. Help was on the way!

I do believe people have experiences of the risen Christ every day. But I think it more important to remember as we walk our journey thru life that it is our responsibility as the Body of Christ to each other. I think that is the main lesson of this story of the "Road to Emmaus."

We need to walk alongside each other on life's journey – We need to support and encourage each other in distressing times as well as rejoicing with each other in good times.

There is a song by Kathleen Harris that says, "*You're the only Jesus some will ever see. You're the only words of life, some will ever read. So let them see in you the One in whom is all they'll ever need. You're the only Jesus, some will ever see. If not you, I wonder who will show them love, and love alone can make things news.*"

Every day we see others who need a glimpse of Christ. A child with a skinned knee. Someone who has lost a loved one. A homeless person who needs shelter and food. Someone who just got a distressing diagnosis at the doctor's. A friend who lost his job. A lonely elderly person or young person for that matter. A teenager who has lost her way and needs encouragement. A person who has suffered discrimination due to their religion, sexual orientation, nationality or race. The list could go on and on. I'm sure you can think of many other persons who need to see Jesus. Maybe **You** can be the lens through which they experience Jesus' presence in a tangible way.

Sometimes **we're** the ones who need saving. It is then that Christ comes to us – **if** we are open to his presence. We need to realize that sometimes Christ's name may be Dixie Grits. Sometimes Christ's name is Sonya, or Charlie, or Bev, or Mary, or Ben or Scott, or Michael or Carol or Phyllis or Round Grove Church.

When we are at our lowest Christ does meet us and gives us hope for the future. Christ reminds us that God loves us and we love God – he hears our cries and saves us.

May you always have eyes to see Jesus on your journey thru life. Amen.